

Assigning Scores and Comments – Museum Grants for African American History and Culture

Summary

- You will access the applications assigned to you by clicking on a link provided to you in an email message from your IMLS primary contact.
- You will enter your scores and comments through the IMLS Online Reviewer System.
- Museum Grants for African American History and Culture (AAHC) panel review uses a single 7-point scale for each application.
- Scores are in whole numbers only. Fractions, ranges, decimals, and zeroes are not allowed.
- You must write a constructive and substantive comment of between 30 and 2000 characters in length for each section of the application narrative: Project Justification, Project Work Plan, Project Results, and Goals.
- All sections of the narrative have equal weight and are equally important in identifying the overall strengths and weaknesses of an application.
- Address your comments to the applicant, not to IMLS or to panel reviewers.
- Your comments should reflect the numeric score you provide for application.

Step-by-Step Instructions

1. Verify Access to Applications

Use the link provided to you in an email message from your IMLS primary contact to access the applications assigned to you. Make sure you see all the applications referenced in the email, and then save each to your computer in a secure place that is not accessible to others. Call or email your IMLS primary contact immediately if any applications are missing or if you cannot open them.

Confidentiality in IMLS Peer Review: The information contained in grant applications is strictly confidential. Do not discuss or reveal names, institutions' project activities, or any other information contained in the applications.

2. Verify Access to IMLS Online Reviewer System

Use the following link to verify that you have access to the IMLS Online Reviewer System:

<https://e-services.imls.gov/grantapps/reviewers.aspx>

To login, enter the email address you have on file with IMLS, and use the default password: **password**. An **E-Review Security Screen** will appear. Read this page and click **OK**. Next, create a user account and establish your own password.

3. Assess Potential Conflicts of Interest

After you have created a new password, click **REVIEW GROUPS**, and your review assignment will appear. To access the list of applications assigned to you, click **VIEW**.

Read through your list of applications again to see if there are any potential conflicts of interest. Please see "[Complying With Ethical Obligations and Avoiding Conflicts of Interest](#)."

CAUTION: Depending on your computer's operating system and/or the browser you use, you *may* see a screen with a column labeled "Conflicts" with a checkable box by each application. **Do not check any of these boxes** as doing so will disable access to the system and make it impossible for others in your review group to do their work. Instead, call or email your IMLS primary contact immediately if you have a conflict, or what may appear to be a conflict.

The screenshot shows the 'Online Reviewer System' interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'Notices', 'Contact Us', and 'Help'. Below it, the IMLS logo and 'Online Reviewer System' title are displayed. The main content area is titled 'Conflict of Interest Statement' and contains instructions for reviewers. A table with columns 'Log Number', 'Application Title', 'Institution Name', 'Application Review Status', and 'Conflicts' is shown. A red arrow points to the 'Conflicts' column header. Below the table, there's a 'Conflict Comments' text area and a 'SUBMIT CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT' button. The footer includes 'MY ONLINE ACCOUNT' and 'LOG OFF' links.

If you have no conflicts of interest with any of the applicants on the list, click **SUBMIT CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT** at the bottom of page.

4. Read Applications

Revisit the AAHC guidelines at http://www.imls.gov/applicants/2014_aaahc_guidelines.aspx. Then read the applications, keeping in mind the review criteria for each section of the narrative. You will not need to reference each bullet point in your comments, but these questions should guide your thinking about the strengths and weaknesses of each application. You can also access these [review criteria as a separate document](#) to keep handy as you read your applications.

To evaluate the **Project Justification**, consider the following:

- Is the project clearly explained?
- Is the need, problem, or challenge to be addressed clearly identified and supported by relevant evidence?
- Are the materials (e.g. objects, specimens, collections) that are the focus of the project and their current condition described and quantified in sufficient detail? (if applicable)
- Are the people who will benefit from the project clearly identified, and have they been involved in planning this project?
- Are the intended results well formulated and achievable?
- Are the ways in which this project advances the institution's strategic plan specific, actionable, and measurable?

To evaluate the **Project Work Plan**, consider the following:

- Are the proposed activities, technologies, and/or methodologies informed by appropriate theory and practice?
- Do the identified staff, partners, consultants, and service providers possess the experience and skills necessary to complete the work successfully?
- Is the schedule of work realistic and achievable?
- Are the time, personnel, and financial resources identified appropriate for the scope and scale of the project?
- Does the institution provide evidence of its capacity to carry out the project activities and meet the cost-share requirement?
- Is a clear methodology described for tracking the project's progress and adjusting course when necessary?
- Is there an effective plan for communicating results and/or sharing discoveries?

To evaluate the **Project Results**, consider the following:

- Are the project's intended results clearly articulated?
- Will the tangible products be useful?
- Are the measures of success in achieving results appropriate for the project?
- Is there a reasonable and practical plan for sustaining the benefits of the project beyond the conclusion of this grant?

To evaluate how well the project meets the **Goals** of the AAHC Program, consider:

- How will the project enhance the institutional capacity and sustainability of the applicant organization?
- How will the project improve care of collections, develop professional management, or provide internship or fellowship opportunities at an African American museum and/or HBCU?

5. Draft Comments

You must write a constructive and substantive comment for each section of the narrative for each application you review. All three sections of the narrative have equal weight and are equally important in identifying the overall strengths and weaknesses of an application.

To organize notes for writing your comments, you may wish to use the "[Peer Review Notes Template](#)." Think about the review criteria for each section of the application narrative as listed above, and be sure to consider all the required components of the application as well as relevant Supporting Documents as resources for your assessment. Draft your comments using a word-processing program for later copying and pasting into the IMLS Online Reviewer System. Remember that each comment must be between 30 and 2000 characters long.

When drafting your comments ...

- use your professional knowledge and experience to assess the information objectively.
- judge the application on its own merits, and do not base your evaluation on any prior knowledge of an institution.
- if you question the accuracy of any information, call us—not the applicant—to discuss it.

Effective comments ...	Poor comments...
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• are presented in a constructive manner.• are concise, specific, and easy to read and understand.• reflect the resources of the institution.• are specific to the individual application.• reflect the numeric score assigned.• reflect the application's strengths and identify areas for improvement.• are directed to applicants—not IMLS or panel reviewers—for their use.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• simply summarize or paraphrase the applicant's own words.• make derogatory remarks.• penalize an applicant because you feel the institution does not need the money.• offer or ask for irrelevant or extraneous information.• make vague or overly general statements.• question an applicant's honesty or integrity.

Make sure your comments justify the scores you provide. A highly complementary comment does not "remove the sting" of a low score, and a negative comment does not "even out" a high one. Comments and scores must complement each other and make sense as a whole.

Below are some examples of **effective** reviewer comments:

Project Justification	
<p>"The applicant established an impressive rationale of the need for project. This museum is an important local resource and this project will provide excellent opportunities for current and future museum professionals. The project goals are well conceived and fall within the parameters of the AAHC grant program. The skills of current staff are being enhanced through participation in workshops, conferences and mentorship with a local historical society; a registrar will be hired; and an internship program is being developed for aspiring museum professionals. This project was based upon a recommendation from professional assessments, and it is clear that the information gained through the assessment process has greatly benefited this applicant.</p>	<p><i>Comment is substantive, addresses the review criteria, and employs a positive tone.</i></p>
<p>"The language in the narrative is generalized and does not identify those specific staff skills that need to be sharpened nor is it clearly stated as to why that need exists. Although the expansion of the facility is stated as a reason for the need for a formalized training for the staff, there is no identification of the new skills required for operating effectively in a new facility. The hiring of a registrar and collections associate is in contrast a specific goal for staff expansion and would lead to a more formalized collection management process."</p>	<p><i>Comment provides a constructive assessment of the application and correlates with overall low score.</i></p>
<p>"The components and goals of the project are clearly identified, as are the specific collections needs and challenges this project is designed to address. The proposal also makes a fairly compelling argument that the expansion of the Museum's collections, the addition of a full-time Collections Assistant, and additional training and professional development will help the Museum better meet its goals.</p> <p>This argument would have been stronger, however, with a clearer understanding of the existing and proposed staff responsibilities in the areas of collections care, exhibits, and education. A listing of the Curator's responsibilities and involvement with collections, for example, would have strengthened the argument for adding a Collections Assistant (as would the inclusion of a position description for this new position). It also would have been helpful to provide some numbers to document the "growing number of researchers, historians, professors, students, etc. who are using the collection."</p>	<p><i>Comment correlates with mid-range score and makes implementable suggestions for improving the project.</i></p>
Project Work Plan	
<p>"The project work plan, schedule, main activities, management team, museum work experience, academic study, and summer internship are clearly described in the application narrative and the Schedule of Completion. The management team seems well qualified for their areas of responsibility. An independent evaluation firm will be retained to assess the success of the program based on four objectives related to preparing students for employment at museums or African American museums, and providing opportunities for these students to be exposed to a wide variety of museums and senior level museum professionals."</p>	<p><i>Comment is evaluative, addresses the review criteria, and uses a positive tone.</i></p>
<p>"The design of this project is impressive and also stands to be an example of best practices for a collaborative internship program and quite frankly it would be for a stand-alone internship program as well. They have clear, concise and attainable goals. The personnel for this project are very well qualified; their work will not only develop the skill set of incoming interns, but also raise the level of expertise for the existing staff. The timeline is detailed, reasonable and manageable as is the budget.</p>	<p><i>Comment provides a constructive assessment of the application and correlates with overall high score.</i></p>

Project Results	
“The intended results of the project are not clearly delineated. There is an effort to connect programming with particular exhibitions, but no specificity as to how this will be accomplished. Although there is an effort at outreach with the local human rights organization, there seems to be no connection to other cultural centers and museums in the area which could provide support services and opportunities for collaboration. There is no plan set forth for sustaining these benefits after the conclusion of the grant beyond the addition of a staff member who would serve as program coordinator. The narrative should match its ambitious vision with the practical details of the project.”	<i>Comment addresses questions from the review criteria.</i>
“The project results stated in the proposal that relate to the collections' conservation tasks are clearly defined; the results of the student internship program are not well defined. There is no internship coordinator defined within the proposal - either from one of the partner universities or from the museum staff - who would ensure that the students receive professional training and guidance during the development of their museum projects. To have identified such a person would definitely strengthen their internship program and the results would benefit all. It would have been advantageous to the project to have demonstrated a sound training program for the internship program and described in detail who from the university level and/or the museum would manage this program.”	<i>Comment correlates with a lower overall score and makes specific implementable suggestions for improving the project.</i>

In contrast, below are some examples of **poor** reviewer comments:

Project Justification	
“The project is justified; there is a clear need to catalogue and document this material. This collection is an important part of the permanent collection at the museum.”	<i>Comment is not relevant to the program goals.</i>
“The museum will hire a temporary curator to develop and fabricate an exhibition to coincide with their town’s bicentennial. They will exhibit materials from their archives and private collections from community stakeholders. The project will be two years in length.”	<i>Comment paraphrases the applicant’s own words.</i>
Project Work Plan	
“The work plan would be improved by putting in more time onsite.”	<i>Comment is very brief and has little value to the applicant.</i>
“Beyond the scope of funding positions, I am finding it difficult to understand the evaluation process of the project's success. Having the ability to acquire new staff is great. It would be better if there was a clear picture on how the organization will sustain the positions beyond the grant. Would a curator or an archivist be a better fit for the organization, the time to catalog the number of objects seems to be wishful.”	<i>Comment does not reflect the score of 7.</i>
“The design of the exhibition is boring and not even remotely relevant to the museum’s mission. The staff is woefully unprepared and will fail in the execution of this project. Targeting federal funds to this museum is a mistake.”	<i>Comment is derogatory and does not provide useful feedback.</i>
Project Results	
“Strong results with very sustainable benefits.”	<i>Comment is very brief and has little worth or value to the applicant.</i>

The chart below summarizes the most frequently asked questions from AAHC panel reviewers:

Should I consider ...?	Yes	No
An institution's financial or staffing needs		X
Whether the project is well planned and the organization has the appropriate resources to complete the project	X	
Whether the applicant has included the information necessary for an adequate evaluation of its merits	X	
Whether a project is new or a resubmission		X
The size or age of the organization		X
An institution's indirect cost rate		X

6. Assign Scores

Assign an overall score to the application that reflects your comments in each of the review sections: Project Justification, Project Work Plan, Project Results, and Goals. Use a scale of 1 to 7, as described below. Use only whole numbers; do not use fractions, ranges, decimals, or zeroes.

SCORE DEFINITIONS	
7 – Exceptional	The applicant's response is exceptionally strong with essentially no weaknesses in its support of the proposed project.
6 – Excellent	The applicant's response is very strong with no more than one minor weakness in its support of the proposed project
5 – Very Good	The applicant's response is strong with only a few minor weaknesses in its support for the proposed project.
4 – Good	The applicant's response is adequate but with numerous minor weaknesses in its support for the proposed project.
3 – Some Merit	The applicant's response may have some strengths but has at least one moderate weakness in its support for the proposed project.
2 – Poor	The applicant's response is deficient and has at least one major weakness in its support of the proposed project.
1 – Inadequate/Insufficient	The applicant's response is either inadequate or insufficient to evaluate fully and/or has numerous major weaknesses in its support of the proposed project.

<i>Minor</i>	<i>An easily addressable weakness that does not substantially lessen the impact of the project</i>
<i>Moderate</i>	<i>A weakness that lessens the impact of the project</i>
<i>Major</i>	<i>A weakness that severely limits the impact of the project</i>

7. Review Your Work

Review your draft comments and preliminary scores. A review with even one missing score or comment cannot be accepted by the IMLS Online Reviewer System. Adjust your scores, if necessary, to reflect more accurately your written evaluation. Scores should support comments, and comments should justify scores.

8. Enter Scores and Comments

Return to the IMLS Online Reviewer System at

<https://e-services.imls.gov/grantapps/reviewers.aspx>

Login with the email address you have on file with IMLS and the password you created in Step 2. Go to your list of assigned applications and click **REVIEW** beside any of them to begin.

Copy and paste your comments into the appropriate blue blocks for each section of the narrative for each application. Be sure to save each comment by clicking **SAVE** at the bottom of the page before you move on to the next one. Use the controls on the side or top of the screen to navigate between sections.

After entering comments in all four sections, go to the Application Overview section and choose a numeric score between 1 and 7 from the SCORE dropdown menu. Use the controls on the side or top of the screen to navigate between sections.

Once you have completed assigning scores and providing comments for each application assigned to you, we recommend that you print a copy of each completed review to keep for your files. Then click on **I AM READY TO SUBMIT THIS REVIEW TO IMLS** to send all your work to IMLS.

At this point, you will not be able to re-enter the IMLS Online Reviewer System unless you notify your IMLS primary contact.

For all questions about reviewing, either technical or programmatic, please call or email your IMLS primary contact directly.

9. Manage Your Copies

Keep your applications and a copy of each review sheet until **September 30, 2014**, in case there are questions from IMLS staff. Continue to maintain confidentiality of all applications that you review by keeping electronic and paper copies in a secure place. After September 30, 2014, destroy the applications and the review sheets.